

BRENDA STOLYAR GEAR SEP 26, 2023 8:00 AM

7 Rapid At-Home Covid-19 Tests—and Where to Find Them

How accurate are over-the-counter swabs? Does your insurance cover them? We have answers.



PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN PAGET/GETTY IMAGES



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THE PANDEMIC ISN'T over. Although it's no longer considered a national and public health emergency, we're currently seeing a surge in cases and the spread of two new variants—[EG.5 \(Eris\)](#) and [BA.2.86 \("Pirola"\)](#). Regardless of how small your social circle is, it's still possible to contract and spread Covid 19. To help prevent this, it's important to get tested regularly (along with [getting vaccinated](#) and [wearing an N95 face mask](#)). Free testing sites are no longer as accessible across the US (the [CDC ICATT program](#) will continue to provide free tests for those without health insurance), but you can opt for rapid at-home Covid tests instead—providing you with results in 15 minutes or so.

With hundreds of options, it's tough to know which one to buy (if they're in stock). We've rounded up options—based on [FDA authorization](#) and availability—to help make the search easier. Members of our team have used some, but not all, of these tests.

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Updated September 2023: We've added information on the new round of free at-home Covid tests and details on a new recall issued from the Philadelphia Health

Department for inauthentic Flowflex COVID-19 Antigen Home Tests.

Table of Contents

- [It's Time to Order Another Round of Free At-Home Covid Tests](#)
- [Are At-Home Covid-19 Tests Covered By Insurance?](#)
- [When to Take an At-Home Covid Test](#)
- [Rapid At-Home Covid-19 Tests](#)
- [A More Accurate Test](#)
- [At-Home Covid-19 Tests to Avoid](#)
- [How to Identify Counterfeit Tests](#)
- [Check for Kits at Each Retailer](#)
- [Delivery Apps That Offer At-Home Tests](#)
- [How Accurate Are These Tests?](#)
- [Reporting Your Self-Test Results](#)
- [How to Store At-Home Covid Tests](#)
- [Check the Expiration Dates](#)
- [Air Travel](#)
- [Best N95, KN95, and Disposable Masks](#)

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Another Round of Free At-Home Covid Tests

Starting September 25, 2023, all households across the US can order four more free at-home Covid tests through [Covid.gov/tests](https://www.covid.gov/tests). For more information on how

to get them, you can check out our guide on [How to Order Your Free At-Home Covid-19 Tests](#).

Are At-Home Covid-19 Tests Covered By Insurance?

On May 11, 2023, the [Biden-Harris administration](#) officially terminated the national and public health emergency surrounding Covid-19. This means over-the-counter Covid tests are no longer covered by private insurance companies (Medicare included). However, private insurance companies can choose to cover the costs voluntarily, so it's worth reaching out to your insurer. [Those on Medicaid](#) will continue to be fully covered through September 30, 2024, at which point coverage will vary by state.

The [COVIDtests.gov program](#) has also been suspended as of June 1, 2023, to conserve the remaining supply of tests. However, the US government says it will continue to provide available at-home tests to underserved communities and uninsured individuals via existing outreach programs. You can learn more information on how to acquire low-cost or free Covid-19 tests from the federal government by contacting an [HRSA health center](#), [ICATT location](#), or [Test to Treat site](#) near you.

When Should I Take an At-Home Covid Test?

It depends. According to [the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), those who are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms should get tested immediately. If you were in close contact with someone who contracted the virus, you should test yourself at least five days after exposure and wear a mask around other people for 10 days.

It's also important to note that while most at-home Covid test kits come with two tests per box, we recommend purchasing multiple boxes if possible. The latest serial testing protocols require testing at least three times over a five-day period depending on your result. (More on this below.)

If you test negative: [Experiencing Covid-19 symptoms](#) but got a negative test

result? Take another test. As of November 1, 2022, the FDA has authorized at-home Antigen Covid tests to be taken at least twice over three days with at least 48 hours between tests. If you test negative and *aren't* experiencing any symptoms—especially if you've been to a gathering with several people—the FDA instructs individuals to test at least three times over a five-day period with at least 48 hours between tests. As per the CDC, it's possible the sample was collected too early in the infection and may show up positive after a few days. If it's *still* negative when you retest, then it's possible any symptoms you have aren't Covid-related. You can also double-check instructions by searching for a specific at-home Covid test on the FDA's site here.

If you test positive: Take another test to verify the result. If both results are positive, you should quarantine for at least five days and wear a mask around other people for an additional five days. Make sure to contact your primary care physician and friends and family who may have been exposed. You can also ask your health care provider about potential treatment options—there are a few FDA-authorized antiviral treatments available that can be taken at home or at a health care facility. Those experiencing severe symptoms should seek medical attention as soon as possible. Many of these tests rely on the honor system—mask up and stay home.

There's a chance your test result may show up as invalid. This means the test didn't work. If this happened with your first test, you can try again with the second one in the box (though you'll need to buy another pack to test again).

Rapid At-Home Covid-19 Tests We Like

Abbott BinaxNow Antigen Rapid Self-Test Kit PHOTOGRAPH: ABBOTT

★ Abbott BinaxNow Antigen Rapid Self-Test Kit for \$24

WALGREENS

WALMART (\$16)

CVS

Abbot's BinaxNow kit provides results within 15 minutes of swabbing your nose and inserting the sample into the included test card. You can then use Navica, the companion app, to self-report your results. Those who test negative will receive a temporary encrypted digital pass they can use as official proof of their test result. With two tests in each box, the company recommends taking another one no sooner than 24 hours but no later than 48 hours. A few members of the Gear team have used this test. We cannot verify its level of accuracy, but it was straightforward to use, with clear instructions.

★ QuickVue At-Home OTC Covid-19 Test Kit for \$24

CVS

WALMART

With the QuickVue at-home test, all you need to do is swab both your nostrils, swirl the swab in the prefilled tube of solution, and dip the test strip in for 10 minutes. If the result is positive, you'll see both a blue line and a pink line appear on the strip. If it's negative, you'll only see a blue line. This kit comes with two tests, so you can take another one within three days. I have used this test—it's easy to administer and understand.

★ Intrivo Diagnostics On/Go Antigen Self-Test for \$20

ON/GO

On/Go's at-home kit comes with a connected app that helps guide you through the process. Once you create an account, you'll use the test cassette, extraction vial, vial cap, and nasal swab included in the box to collect your sample. After 10 minutes, you'll be prompted to upload a photo of your result, and the app will confirm whether it is positive, negative, or invalid (at which point you can try again). Of all the at-home rapid tests I've tried so far, this was the easiest to use. The steps are simple enough that I'm not reaching for the instructions every single time—something I can't say for the others. The standard version has two tests per box, but you can purchase a single pack for \$9.

InteliSwab Rapid Antigen Home Test Kit PHOTOGRAPH: WALMART

InteliSwab Rapid Antigen Home Test Kit for \$18

WALMART

InteliSwab looks different from the standard at-home Covid test kit, and it also requires the longest wait time. Instead of a separate nasal swab, this one comes with a flat pad attached to the result window. Once you swab both nostrils with the flat pad, insert the pad into the tube of solution and wait 30 to 40 minutes for your results to appear.

FlowFlex Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test PHOTOGRAPH: TARGET

FlowFlex Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test for \$10

CVS

RITE AID

AMAZON (2 TESTS)

TARGET (5-PACK)

Unlike nearly every other test kit, you'll likely find that FlowFlex only comes with one test per box. That's because, in 2021, the FDA was confident enough in this

test that it didn't advise you to test yourself again after a few days—unless you felt new symptoms coming in. But in 2022, the FDA updated its repeat testing protocols. The instruction manual included in this test kit now states that if you have symptoms on the first day of testing but receive a negative result, you should test again in 48 hours. If you don't have symptoms but receive a negative result, you should test at least two more times with 48 hours in between tests. So, we recommend opting for the 5-pack if you can find it.

The process is similar to any other at-home Covid test: Swab your nose, dip the swab in the solution, and squeeze a few drops onto a small plastic test card. After 15 to 30 minutes, your results will appear. This test comes in a much more compact box and is easier to unbox and use than some tests we tried.

Warning: *If you're shopping for the FlowFlex, make sure it comes in a white box. In January 2022, the FDA recalled a counterfeit version called Flowflex SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Test (Self-Testing) that hasn't been authorized for sale in the US. (It came in a dark blue box.) Make sure to look for tests called FlowFlex Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test in a white box. The FDA also issued a warning for another set of fraudulent versions being distributed in April 2022. You can find the exact signs to look for here.*

*On September 9, 2023, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health issued a recall for what they believe to be Flowflex Covid-19 Antigen Home Tests. In a press release, the Health Department said that following "a routine shelf-life extension program check" they found a specific lot number was not listed on the US FDA's shelf-life extension website. Once it was confirmed these tests were not authentic, they were removed from distribution status. If your test lists the lot number **COV2110012**, you should throw it away immediately.*

iHealth Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test for \$18

AMAZON

IHEALTH

The iHealth Covid-19 kit comes with a nasal swab, solution, and a test card. After

collecting your sample and soaking it in the solution, add three drops of it to the test card. In 15 minutes your result will appear on the card, and you can then upload it to the companion app. If you test negative, you'll get access to an iHealth Pass to use as digital proof. The Covid-19 Test Card inside the foil pouch should be used within one hour of opening it.

Warning: *In May 2022, the FDA issued a warning for counterfeit versions of the iHealth Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test kits that haven't been authorized for sale in the US. The images on the Instructions for Use pamphlet included with some counterfeit versions differ slightly from the authentic version. Both iHealth and the FDA are in the process of finding additional identifiable signs to look for. People who live in South Carolina and have purchased an iHealth Covid-19 test should also double-check the lot number on their kits. In November of 2022, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control determined that a limited amount of at-home tests "may have invalid result cartridges because of a manufacturer error." You can read more here.*

A More-Accurate Test

In addition to at-home antigen rapid tests, you can also opt for an at-home molecular test. Antigen tests (rapid tests) detect proteins on the surface of the virus, while molecular tests (typically known as PCR tests) detect the virus' genetic material—making it typically more accurate. But since PCR tests require a laboratory and a few days to receive results, they're not as convenient as 15-minute rapid tests.

The molecular test below uses central hubs equipped with lab-quality technology. With the help of a few other accessories, it can provide PCR-like results within 15 minutes. It's more helpful for those who travel often and/or work in industries that require being around large groups of people.

PHOTOGRAPH: CUE HEALTH

Cue Health Covid-19 Diagnostic Test for \$364

Cue Health's molecular at-home test ([7/10, WIRED Recommends](#)) is perhaps the most luxurious on the market (a sentence I never thought I'd say). If it weren't for its *extremely* steep price (a Cue Reader and 10-pack of swabs will set you back a whopping \$749)—even if you opt for one of [its membership tiers with subscription pricing](#))—I'd easily recommend it solely for its ease of use. No solution, tubes, cassettes, or test strips are required. Simply open the connected app, insert a cartridge into the Cue Reader, swab your nose, and insert the swab into the cartridge. After 20 minutes, you'll receive results on your phone. The

company says its test has an accuracy rate of 97.8 percent.

Warning: *An app is required to use this test, so you should check if your phone is compatible.*

Rapid Covid-19 Tests to Avoid

These four at-home rapid tests were recalled. According to the FDA, both SD Biosensor and Celltrion's tests have been distributed “with labeling indicating they are authorized by the FDA, but neither test has been authorized, cleared, or approved by the FDA for distribution or use in the United States.”

Certain lots of Pilot tests (by SD Biosensor Inc.) were recalled by the FDA due to “significant concerns of bacterial contamination” found in the liquid solution included in the kit. It's important to note none of the impacted tests were distributed through the Free At-Home Covid-19 tests program. The FDA says the recall applies to test kits that “were distributed by Roche Diagnostics to certain retailers in the United States. Approximately 500,000 tests were distributed to CVS Health, as well as about 16,000 tests to Amazon.” The list of affected lots can be found here.

Detect, on the other hand, voluntarily recalled specific lots of its Covid-19 tests. You can check here for a list of affected lots.

- SD Biosensor Standard Q Covid-19 Ag Home Test
- Celltrion DiaTrust Covid-19 Ag Home Test
- Detect Covid-19 Test
- Pilot Covid-19 At-Home Test

How to Identify Counterfeit Covid-19 Tests

You can check for a current list of counterfeit at-home Covid-19 tests through the FDA's site here. But if you're unsure, you can check for a few signs. The packaging

might include spelling or grammatical errors, poor print quality of text and images (as well as on the instructions inside the box), a different label or trade name than the one listed on the [FDA's site](#), or missing information on the box (like the expiration date, lot number, or QR code). On the inside, you should look for any missing supplies—including unfilled components, like the tube of solution.

If you find that your at-home test kit is counterfeit, you shouldn't use it. You should also contact the store you purchased it from and the manufacturer/distributor of the authorized test. Then, follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to properly dispose of or return the test. The FDA also encourages reporting the problem via the [MedWatch Voluntary Reporting Form](#).

Retailer At-Home Covid Test Kit Pages

Depending on where you're located, at-home rapid Covid tests might be sold out. If you want to continue browsing for availability, below is a list of retailers selling kits.

- [Amazon](#)
- [Target](#)
- [Walmart](#)
- [Walgreens](#)
- [CVS](#)
- [Rite Aid](#)
- [Sam's Club](#)

Delivery Apps That Offer At-Home Covid Test Kits

If you've been experiencing symptoms or don't want to leave your house, you can order an at-home Covid test through a food delivery service app for same-day delivery (if the app is available in your area). Below is a list of apps that offer test kits.

- DoorDash ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Uber Eats ([iOS](#), [Android](#))

- Gopuff ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Instacart ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Seamless ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Postmates ([iOS](#), [Android](#))

To make sure you always have a steady supply of at-home Covid tests, you can sign up for a subscription service. With [GetTests.com](#), you'll have eight test kits delivered to your home each month. If your insurance company covers your at-home tests or you have [Medicaid](#), your reimbursement claim will also be filed each month automatically to your insurance provider [through Reimbursify](#). The service is currently sending subscribers the FlowFlex Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test.

How Accurate Are Rapid At-Home Covid Tests?

The FDA has granted each of the rapid at-home tests below “**emergency use authorization**,” (EUA) but these tests aren't 100 percent accurate. Most at-home rapid antigen tests have a sensitivity of roughly 85 percent (varies by test), according to the FDA. There is a chance you could end up with a false positive or a false negative. Nearly every kit comes with two tests for repeat testing, so you can double-check your results.

Should You Report Your Positive Result?

[Per the CDC](#), there currently aren't any systems in place that require you to report a positive at-home test result to public health authorities. However, it's strongly encouraged that you contact your physician to make sure you receive the proper medical care and treatment. You can also check whether your local health department offers an online self-reporting form. There's also [MakeMyTestCount.org](#), created by the [National Institutes of Health](#), which allows you to anonymously self-report an at-home Covid test result.

How Should I Store At-Home Covid Tests?

As you're stocking up on tests, it's important to make sure the kits are stored properly to avoid false-negative results. Most at-home rapid tests should be kept in a dry location (out of direct sunlight) where the temperature is between about 35 degrees and 86 degrees Fahrenheit. But you can find instructions for specific tests you're using via the manufacturer's instructions that come with each kit.

According to [the FDA](#), "the test performance will remain stable when tests are stored at various temperatures, including shipping during the summer in very hot regions and in the winter in very cold regions." However, you shouldn't use a rapid test if it's still cold after being exposed to freezing temperatures. Instead, bring it inside and leave it in an area at room temperature for two hours before opening it.

Make sure rapid tests are kept out of children's reach too since the small vial and cap can be choking hazards. Additionally, as per the [National Poison Control Center](#), the solution found in the vials included with a lot of rapid antigen kits (such as BinaxNow, Flowflex, and BD Veritor) uses sodium azide as a preservative agent—which can be toxic if ingested in low doses. While the amount of sodium azide in rapid tests is too low to be considered poisonous, it can still cause irritation when exposed to the eyes, nose, or skin (including chemical burns).

Check the Expiration Dates

It's important to pay close attention to the expiration date of at-home rapid test kits. Typically, this is found on the outside of the test's packaging, labeled "Exp" or with an hourglass icon. However, since some tests have been granted an extended shelf life by the FDA, the date you see on the packaging might no longer be accurate. Below, we've listed which tests now have a longer shelf life and their new expiration period. The new shelf life of each test is only applicable if they're stored properly (as noted above). If you don't see your at-home Covid test listed

below, check [here](#).

- **Abbott BinaxNow Antigen Rapid Self-Test Kit:** Expires after [22 months](#); check the new expiration date according to your lot number [here](#).
- **FlowFlex Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test:** Expires after 21 months; check the new expiration date based on the printed date [here](#).
- **Intrivo Diagnostics On/Go Antigen Self-Test:** Expires after 21 months; check the new expiration date [here](#).
- **iHealth Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test:** Expires [after 15 months](#); check the new expiration of your test kit by typing in the lot number [here](#).
- **BD Veritor Digital Test Kit:** Expires after 10 months; check the new expiration date [here](#).
- **QuickVue At-Home OTC COVID-19 Test:** Expires after 16 months; check the new expiration date [here](#).
- **InteliSwab COVID-19 Rapid Test:** Expires after 12 months; check the new expiration date [here](#).
- **Clinitest Rapid Covid-19 Antigen Self-Test:** Expires after 24 months; check the new expiration date [here](#).
- **Lucira Check It COVID-19 Test:** Expires after 18 months; check the new expiration date [here](#).
- **Cue Health Covid-19 Diagnostic Test:** Expires after 9 months; be sure to update the companion app before testing.

Do You Need Proof of a Negative Test for Air Travel?

Whether traveling internationally into the US or domestically throughout the country, you're [not required](#) to show proof of a negative rapid test before boarding a flight. However, [the CDC recommends](#) delaying your trip until you're fully vaccinated or getting a viral test no more than three days before traveling. You should also refrain from traveling if you're sick. Check if the location you're traveling to has specific travel restrictions in place too, in addition to checking the airline you're traveling with. Check out our guide to [safe travel within the US](#) for

more details.

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